

## **Oona Lochner, “Textile Production of Space,” 2011 (Translated by Ari Akkermans).**

How are our notions of space developed? Traces of this question are visible in Katherina Olschbaur’s painting up to her series “Hülsen” [Hulls] (2005–2007), through which, based on the human figure, she experiments with the concurrence between fullness and void. Pieces of clothing act as a substitute for the actual actors, yet the textile symbols are always bereft of head and hands, henceforth, the quintessential elements of the portrait, such as mimicry, gesture and the clay colours of human flesh are absent too. The textiles instead, release themselves from their role as accessoires and become an instrument of their own, through which the bodies emerge out of the empty space. The idea of textile materials serving to shape forms, as Olschbaur had already formulated here, is intensified in her more recent work.

In her display windows series, the vertically draped cloth width acts as an anthropomorphic symbol. As they are coming to life, the displayed consumer goods are suddenly turned into a theatrical embodiment of themselves and the display window becomes then the floor for nightly dancers and the perfect arena for the orchestration of a conspiracy. Enveloping the empty space in their broad pleats, the cloths billow into human bodies, while at the same time remaining unmistakably in the forms of the textile material that provides concise information about the style of their mounting and draping. Olschbaur also re-creates this so lively tension of identities between representation and textile material in a series of paper works titled “Großmutter Gespenst” [Grandmother Spectre]. A floral patterned cloth is shaping itself out of the repeatedly empty space into an ever so new form; yet, the position of its bearer remains empty, as the abbozzatura of the composition is fading out into the white flatness of the sketch paper.

While we may surmise that the cloth lies now here over a tripod, now there over a chair, the place that marks the draping of the pleats still remains unclear. Architectural elements also come into play to enact Olschbaur’s rather vague innuendo of space. The rear wall of the display windows is more often than not, designed as an ornamental lattice, but the frames and the salient ridges frequently consist of only a few lines or a narrow strip of colour. The margins of this raree show repeatedly come to an end already inside the canvas, so that only a strip of colour remains around the moulded space, abstract and without a close-up effect. The illusory space of the painting encounters here unmediatedly its own material bearings and thus becomes

fully recognizable as something constructed and arbitrary; hardly a reliable point of reference for the viewer.

In the same fashion, Olschbaur's "Interieurs" also wander in uncertainty, for here too the boundaries of the inner space are only ambiguously delineated. Alignments, doors or windows are mismatched pieces that refuse a definite interpretation of their actual location. All too often the volume of the furniture appears to be the only spatially defined element, placed haphazardly into a formless environment. The topographical ambiguity, however, is carried over into the objects as well, when sofas and lamps rise out of the floor, or when, framed by scenery-like architecture, a hole turns into the central piece of an interior. On the one hand, the hole captures a certain moment of total loss and free fall, so that, on the other hand, along with the sidewalls, the floor recedes too. As a place of absence, it is above all a negative dimension that, like the "Hülsen" [Hulls] or the bodies of textile, it possesses volume only as a shrouded form.

The shrouding into empty space will reach at long last into the walls, as they fold on and on within another interior and move backwards into the depth of the pictorial space. The architectures, by all means fragmented, meet now the textile vocabulary of pleats, loops and crumples and, once again, take up the issue of the relationship between pictorial space and the material surface of the image. While the pleating of the textile material still takes place inside the image; a creeping suspicion affects the viewer with in that it could reach out of the canvas, so that it becomes constrained and brings out the spatial dimension less than it is closing it up and shaping it. It is precisely this overlapping cut through the layers of what is real, that forms the basis of the series "Schreine" [Shrines]. Here space is dissolved into abstract fields of color that resemble the swelling of drapery, yet the symbols remain constantly flat. Beginning with richly adorned altar cloth, sharp creases spread over the whole length of the canvas, which appears suddenly itself creased, pouting and opening up. Katherina Olschbaur brings together and at the same time transforms the material nature of her medium and its power for illusion at the very limit between space and textile, and while at that, she questions anew the possibility of the production of space in painting.

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